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ABSTRACT

Telephone interviews with Chicanas--30 graduates and 20 dropouts from Title VII Bilingual Education Doctoral Fellowship Programs in Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas are reported. The study sought information on how the Chicanas' perceptions of racism, sexism, economics, family responsibilities, support networks, role models, and mentors affected persistence and graduation. The present report addresses the resulting demographic profile and racism and sexism variables. Results show a significant relationship between persistence and marital status, but no statistically significant relationship with age or existence of dependents, and no significant relationship with perception of racism or sexism. However, a majority of the Chicanas felt they were victims of sexism and about one-fifth felt they were victims of racism in the program. Recommendations for improvement of the situation include an end to sexual harassment, equitable distribution of research and teaching assistantships, institutionalization of bilingual education doctoral programs, sincere institutional efforts to employ ethnic minority and women faculty who can serve as role models, and universities with high rates of success in graduating these fellows be studied for traits contributing to that success. (MSE)

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Chicana Doctoral Students: Another Look at Educational Equity

Jayni Flores

Telephone interviews were conducted with 50 Chicanas—30 graduates and 20 dropouts—who had been enrolled in Title VII Bilingual Education Doctoral Fellowship Programs in the Southwestern states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

The interview was designed to provide a demographic profile for each of the students and information on the Chicanas' perceptions of such variables as racism, sexism, economics, family responsibilities, support networks, role models, and mentors. The central purpose of the study was to test the effects of these variables on the Chicanas' attrition or graduation. This paper addresses only the demographic profile and the racism and sexism variables.

Major conclusions are presented along with recommendations for future studies and suggestions for helping graduate faculties be more attuned to the special needs of ethnic minority women in graduate school.

According to the 1980 Census the ratio of white, non-Hispanic women to Chicanas was 21.6 to 1. In fiscal year 1980, 7,104 white, non-Hispanic women received doctoral degrees while only 33 Chicanas received the same degree; distribution proportionate to the general population would reflect a ratio of 322.9 Chicanas to 7,104 white, non-Hispanic women receiving the doctoral degree. This research was conducted in an attempt to determine why Chicanas have such a disproportionately low rate of completion at the doctoral level as compared to white, non-Hispanic women.

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The study also examined the variables that differentiate those Chicanas who complete their programs of study—the graduates—from those who do not—the dropouts. For this study, a *graduate* is a Chicana who has completed the terminal degree, either the Ph.D. or Ed.D., under the Title VII Bilingual Education Doctoral Fellowship Program. A *dropout* is someone who left the Fellowship Program before completing course requirements or who was lacking only the dissertation and had not moved in the direction of completion two years after finishing course requirements. It was assumed that all of these women had the necessary skills to be admitted to graduate school.

METHODS

The sample of subjects selected for this study was from among Chicana Title VII Bilingual Education Doctoral Fellows at selected universities throughout the southwestern states of Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas.

Telephone interviews were conducted with 30 Chicana graduates and 20 Chicana dropouts between January and May 1984. Table 1 shows the number of graduates and dropouts selected randomly from each state and university.

An interview guide was developed by the researcher for use in the telephone interviews. The interview guide was designed to provide a demographic profile for each of the subjects and information on the Chicanas' perceptions of such variables as racism, sexism, economics, family responsibilities, support networks, role models, and mentors. The central purpose of the study was to test the effects of these variables on the Chicanas' attrition or graduation.

When the interviews were completed, the responses were recorded on a coding matrix and processed by computer. The coding matrix was developed to record and report each subject's data while maintaining her anonymity. Chi-square tests of independence, the Fisher's exact test of probabilities, and frequencies and percentages were used to analyze the data. For the purposes of this paper only the demographic profile and the racism and sexism variables will be addressed.

DEMOGRAPHICS

The first objective of this study was to provide a demographic profile of the 50 Chicana Title VII Fellows selected for the sample. Variables examined from the demographic profile were:

Table 1
Breakdown of Respondents by State

State	University	Number of Graduates Chosen	Number of Dropouts Chosen
Arizona	1	1	2
	2	2	0
California	1	1	1
	2(a)	0	0
	3	0	1
	4(b)	0	0
	5	2	0
Colorado	1	2	1
New Mexico	1	2	7
	2	5	4
Texas	1	1	0
	2	10	4
	3	4	0

[a]Only two Chicanas were enrolled in this Title VII Program. Both were still in the process of taking classes.

[b]Only one Chicana had been enrolled in this Title VII Program. She had graduated from the program but was not selected because of randomized selection.

(1) age of the women when they began the doctoral program, (2) marital status at the beginning of the doctoral program, (3) whether a change in marital status had occurred by the time the women received the degree or left the program, and (4) number of dependents the women had.

Chi-square tests were computed to determine the relationship between age at beginning of the doctoral program and its relationship to completion of or dropout from the doctoral program. Three age categories were tested: 30 years of age and younger, 31-35 years of age, and 36 years of age and over.

The resulting data indicate that the ascribed characteristic, chronological age, is not statistically significant ($p < .05$) for Chicanas in determining completion of or withdrawal from the Bilingual Education Doctoral Fellowship Program. Data for ages of Chicana Title VII Fellows appear in Table 2.

Because cells for divorced or separated and widowed resulted in expected counts of fewer than five, the two columns for *divorced or separated* and *widowed* were collapsed. Therefore, the relationship between marital status and completion or dropping out was computed for single, married, and the combined column. The calculated chi-square was 13.239 ($p > .001$). The data, shown in Table 3, indicate that for Chicanas in the Title VII Fellowship

Table 2
Age of Respondents at Beginning of Doctoral Program

Age	30 and under	31-35	36 and over
Dropouts	8	5	7
Graduates	14	11	5

Program the achieved status, marriage, results in a significantly higher dropout rate for married women than for those who did not have a primary relationship with a man when they began their doctoral program.

A separate analysis of the question of whether these Chicanas had changed marital status by the time they graduated or left the program was computed. The computed chi-square showed no statistically significant change of marital status ($p > .05$) for either the graduates or dropouts.

Data for computing the number of dependents were also collapsed because some cells resulted in expected counts of fewer than five. Data were collapsed to provide columns for number of dependents as follows: 0 dependents, 1-2 dependents, and 3-6 dependents. The computed chi-square was not statistically significant for the number of dependents relating to graduation or attrition in this study. What is worthy of note is that 19 of the 30 graduates reported no dependents and only 4 graduates had 3-6 dependents. Only 6 of the 20 dropouts reported 0 dependents and the other 14 were almost evenly divided between the other two columns. Eight dropouts reported 1-2 dependents and six dropouts reported 3-6 dependents.

The results of the demographic portion of this study seem to be consistent with previous findings reported in the literature (Cross, 1974; Feldman, 1974; Fischer & Peters, 1979; Rees, 1974) that women tend to receive doctoral degrees later in life than men. A slightly higher number of the graduates in this study were 31.2 years old or older when they began their doctoral program.

Table 3
Marital Status at Beginning of Doctoral Program

Status	Single	Married	Divorced Separated or Widowed
Dropouts	3	15	2
Graduates	17	7	6

Although this study did not ask about their age at the time they received the degree, it can be assumed that most of the graduates would be 34 years old or older when they completed the doctorate.

In regard to marital status, the present study appears to support previous research (Cross, 1974; Feldman, 1974; Fischer & Peters, 1979) which reports that the least successful students are those women who attempt to combine the spouse and student roles.

The results for the third variable, dependents, also seem to be consistent with previous findings (Bean & Creswell, 1980; Centra, 1974; Gilmartin, 1980) that as one moves up the ladder of educational attainment, the percentage of never married or divorced women increases. The literature suggests that in order to achieve high educational and occupational status, females must often postpone marriage and reduce childbearing. What is significant, of course, is that men do not have to forego marriage and family to attain their education and occupational status.

RACISM AND SEXISM

The second objective of this study was to ascertain, according to the Chicanas' perceptions, to what extent variables such as racism and sexism related to their graduation or attrition. Each relationship was examined using chi-square tests of independence, Fisher's exact test, or frequencies and percentages. Because these relationships are qualitative descriptive material, the comments provided by the subjects for further elaboration are included in the discussion of results below.

For the variable *racism*, the Chicanas were asked if they ever felt that they had more problems in the doctoral program than Anglo students. The chi-square test results showed that racism was not a statistically significant variable related to graduation or noncompletion of the program.

To ascertain the Chicanas' perception of sexism as an effect of their completion of or withdrawal from the doctoral program, the women were asked whether they ever felt that because they are women they had more difficulties in the program than the men. The computed chi-square showed that sexism was not statistically significant either.

Because of the qualitatively descriptive nature of these two questions, the researcher felt that further examination and discussion of these questions were necessary. The raw data show

that for the *racism* variable, 21 of the women, which represents 42 percent of all the subjects, answered yes to this question. All subjects were asked to elaborate on their answer.

The comments recorded for the racism variable can be basically divided into two categories: (1) those who experienced racism from professors; and (2) those who felt Anglo students at the doctoral level came into the doctoral program with a better educational background. The six women who fit the second category seemed to feel that because they are Chicanas their previous educational experiences had not prepared them in developing the levels of speaking and writing skills necessary for doctoral work. A typical comment is, "I think I'm as intelligent as anyone, but I think they had better writing skills. They had better educations in high school, were better prepared."

Two comments from the women who are included in the first category, those who felt racism from professors, best summarize and describe the feeling of the other 15 women answering this question in the affirmative. Their comments follow:

S1: "Differences in expectations. Several professors wondered if I was really serious about the doctorate. My professors thought I wouldn't be a good writer because I am Hispanic."

S2: "That's hard to answer. I don't think I had problems academically. I think the professors had trouble seeing me as a serious student because of my ethnicity. It also depended on what field they were in."

Of interest with regard to the racism question is that even the two women who answered the question negatively, when they elaborated, said they felt that as Chicanas, more was expected of them in the doctoral program.

For the sexism variable, 28 women, representing 56 percent of all the subjects, answered yes to this question. When the women elaborated on this answer, their comments are again worthy of note. The comments for this variable can be separated in to the following three broad categories: (1) family/home responsibilities; (2) sexism on the professors' part; (3) lack of faculty support networks for the women.

The following two statements best summarize what was said in the first category (family/home responsibilities):

S1: "Yes, because of home obligations. I had to cook, wash, and all that before I could study."

S2: "Particularly toward the end. I was being pressured to finish. I don't think they're sensitive to mothers. The director

helped two men get an extension on the Fellowship but not myself and another woman. The issue of my having a child came up."

Sexism on the professors' part is perhaps best summarized by this woman's statement: "One professor seemed to think there was something wrong with me because I wasn't married."

The lack of mentors or a professional networking system reported in previous studies (Acevedo & Escobedo, 1981; Centra, 1974; Hartsock, 1974; Tidball, 1974) was felt by the women interviewed for this study. The following comments summarize their perceptions:

S1: "You have less opportunities as far as getting into cliques and projects going on."

S2: "Our universities are male-oriented and controlled. The men were facilitated through social contact with male professors."

S3: "Especially in the bilingual classes you have the 'compadre syndrome.' Research assistantships in bilingual education usually went to males."

From the review of the comments on the two above variables, it seems that there may be an interaction effect between ethnicity and sex. It was difficult for some of the women to distinguish clearly whether problems or stresses encountered in the doctoral program were linked to being women or being a Chicana or both. For example, the women who mentioned "traditional roles and stereotypes" seemed to be unsure whether they were being stereotyped or cast in the traditional roles of women in general or specifically those of Mexican-American women.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Because the population studied is a small and unique group, many of the variables yielded results that show no strong relationships between graduating and dropping out. This is not unusual when such groups are studied. Statistical analyses alone cannot present a clear picture of what happens to such a population in the doctoral process. Descriptive statistics also need to be incorporated to clarify and refine what statistical tests alone do not show.

The following can be concluded about the Chicanas interviewed for this study:

1. There is a significant relationship between marital status and completion of or dropout from the Title VII Doctoral Fellowship

Program. These data indicate, as does previous research (Bean & Creswell, 1980; Feldman, 1974; Halleck, 1976; Patterson & Sells, 1973), that married women are less likely to complete a doctoral program than women who are not married.

2. Age and number of dependents are not statistically significant for Chicanas in determining graduation from or dropout from the Fellowship Program. There is a difference between graduates and dropouts, though, in number of dependents. Sixty-three percent of the 30 graduates had no dependents, while only 30 percent of the 20 dropouts had no dependents.

3. The perception of racism experienced while in the doctoral program was not statistically significant in affecting graduation or attrition rates. However, 21 percent of all the women interviewed felt that they were victims of racism while in the doctoral program.

4. There is no statistical difference between graduates and dropouts regarding perception of sexism. But 56 percent of the total population perceived that they were victims of sexism while in the fellowship program.

Based upon the findings of the present study, it seems that graduate faculties should be attuned to the special needs and problems of women, and especially of ethnic minority women, in their doctoral programs. These needs and problems include the following:

—that professors not have lower levels of expectations for ethnic minority women;
—that assertiveness is not a sign of a woman's undermining the professor's authority;
—that sexual harassment either in the form of inappropriate comments regarding marital status, clothing, body size/shape, or actual passes made at women be stopped;
—that equitable distribution of research and teaching assistantships between the sexes be ensured;
—that women, especially single mothers, often have added responsibilities at home to attend to.

The doctoral process has enough stress built into it without the added burden of sexist and/or racist behavior among professors.

Further recommendations that appear to be supported by this study include the following:

1. Because of future cuts in the funding of Title VII Doctoral Programs and to ensure educational equity, the universities

that have relied on Title VII funds should take immediate steps to institutionalize the bilingual education doctoral programs.

2. The review of the literature suggests, and the results of the present study appear to support, that it is important for women and ethnic minority students to have role models with whom they can identify. Therefore, it is recommended that universities make a sincere attempt to employ and promote ethnic minority and women faculty members so that minority and female graduate students have an opportunity to have role models.
3. The universities that have had a high rate of success in graduating Title VII Fellows should be studied for traits or characteristics of those universities that have contributed to the success of their students.

Until 1984, very few, if any, studies of the perceived effects of sexism and racism on Chicanas' doctoral work had been undertaken. Future similar studies should be conducted with women of other Hispanic groups to compare Hispanic women's rates of completion of doctoral programs. Similar studies should also be conducted that include Chicano (male) subjects to compare the Chicano doctoral study experience to that of Chicanas.

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